

# THE CREDITOR

A Tragic Comedy

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AUGUST STRINDBERG



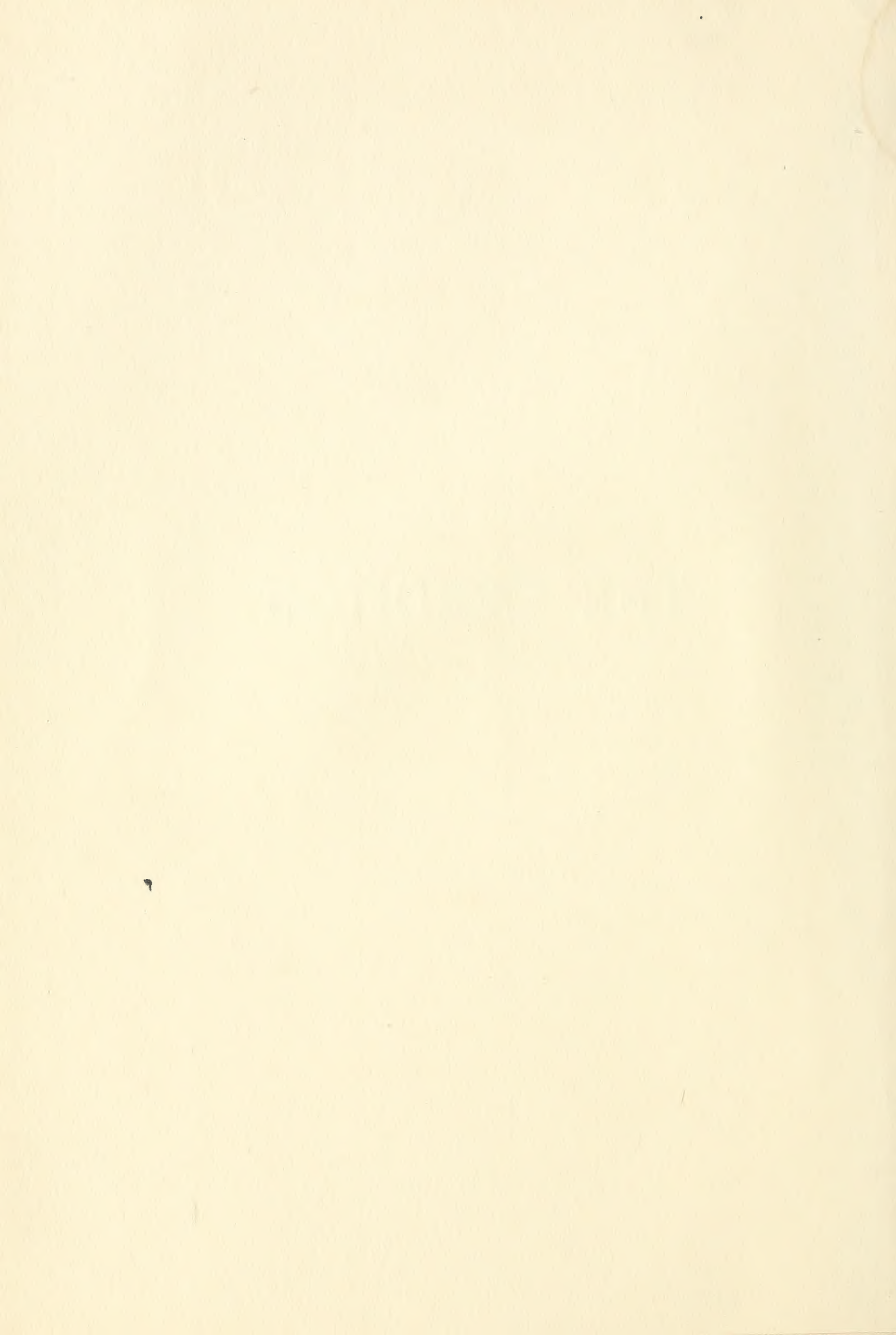
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A Tragic Comedy

BY

AUGUST STRINDBERG

Author of "Motherlove," "Swanwhite," "Froken Julie," etc.

Translated from the Swedish

BY

FRANCIS J. ZIEGLER



PHILADELPHIA

BROWN BROTHERS

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A Tragic Comedy by AUGUST STRINDBERG  
English Version by FRANCIS J. ZIEGLER

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## FOREWORD

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Amid that remarkable group of one-act plays which embodies August Strindberg's maturest work as a playwright, the tragic comedy "Fordringsägare," ("The Creditor"), occupies a prominent place.

Avowedly an attempt to break with stage tradition, to enlarge the scope of the drama, it has both the excellencies and the extravagances peculiar to all revolutionary art, whether literary or pictorial. It serves the Swedish dramatist as a vehicle for displaying his diabolical skill as a psychologist, and, incidentally, as a means of exploiting his personal attitude toward woman-kind; for Strindberg, despite his occasional lapses into matrimony and a sort of naturalistic romanticism, is a misogynist at heart.

"Fordringsägare" was produced for the first time in 1889, when it was given at Copenhagen as a substitute for "Fröken Julie," the performance of which was forbidden by the censor. Four years later Berlin audiences made its acquaintance, since when it has remained the most popular of Strindberg's plays in Germany.

So far as is known, this is the first appearance of "The Creditor" in English dress.

F. J. Z.





## CHARACTERS.

Thekla.

Adolph, her husband, painter.

Gustave, her divorced husband, head teacher (traveling under an assumed name).



# THE CREDITOR

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## SCENE.

*A salon in a seashore hotel. In the background a door leading to a veranda through which is seen a view of the distant landscape. A table with newspapers somewhat to the right; a chair to the left; a chaise longue to the right of the table. Door to a room at the right.*

*(Adolph and Gustave at the table to the right.)*

ADOLPH.

*(Modeling a wax figure on a small modeling stand; his two crutches lean beside him.)*

And for all this I have you to thank!

GUSTAVE.

*(Smoking a cigar.)*

Oh, nonsense!

ADOLPH.

I'm in earnest. The first day after my wife had gone I lay helpless and bored on a sofa. It was as if she had

taken my crutches with her, so that I could not move from the place. After I had slept for a day, I came to life and began to collect myself; my head, which had been working feverishly, began to quiet; old thoughts, which belonged to earlier days, reappeared; the desire to work and the impulse to create came back; the eye regained its power to see rightly and cunningly—and then you appeared.

GUSTAVE.

You were miserable when I met you, granted, and you went on crutches, but that is not saying that my presence has been the primary cause of your recovery. You required rest and you needed masculine companionship.

ADOLPH.

Yes, what you say is all true. I used to have men friends, but after I married they seemed superfluous, and I was contented with the single friendship of my wife. Then I came into new circles and made many new acquaintances, but my wife grew jealous of them; she wanted me to herself. What was worse, she wanted my friends to herself, and so I was left alone with my jealousy.

GUSTAVE.

You with symptoms of that disease! You?

ADOLPH.

I feared to lose her and tried to come before them.



Was that strange? But I did not fear that she would be untrue to me.

GUSTAVE.

No, a husband never fears that!

ADOLPH.

No, isn't that remarkable! What I feared was chiefly that the friends would gain an influence over her and, through it, an indirect power over me—and that I could not bear.

GUSTAVE.

Then you and your wife have differences of opinion?

ADOLPH.

Since you have heard so much, you shall hear everything. My wife has an independent nature——Why are you laughing?

GUSTAVE.

Go on!——“She has an independent nature——”

ADOLPH.

That will accept nothing from me——

GUSTAVE.

But from everyone else!

ADOLPH.

*(After a pause.)*

Yes! And it even seems as if she hated my ideas, not because they are absurd, but because they come from me. Then, it has often happened that she has taken my old ideas and advanced them as her own; yes, it has even happened that one of my friends has instilled an idea into her head which ~~he~~ received direct from me and that she has relished it. Relished everything except what came from me!

GUSTAVE.

That is to say, you are not really happy.

ADOLPH.

But I am happy! I have her I wanted, and I have never wished for another.

GUSTAVE.

And never wished to be free?

ADOLPH.

No, I can't say that. At times I have thought that I should have more peace of mind if I were free. But she had only to leave me alone and I longed for her, longed for her as for my arms and legs! It is strange,

but at times it seems to me as if she were not a separate being, but a part of my own individuality, an intestine that carried my will and my desire to live, as if I had deposited my vital force in her custody.

GUSTAVE.

Possibly that is so, if one considers it rightly.

ADOLPH.

How can that be? She is an independent being with a multitude of personal ideas. When I met her I was nothing; an artist-child whom she brought up.

GUSTAVE.

But you begot her thoughts and developed them, did you not?

ADOLPH.

No! They grew and I cultivated them.

GUSTAVE.

Yes. Then it is peculiar that her literary ability fell off, or at least stood still, after her first book. But then she had a strong subject—She must have drawn her husband.—You never knew him? He must have been an idiot!

ADOLPH.

I never knew him. He had gone away six months before I met her, but he must have been a confounded idiot if he fitted her description! (*Pause.*) And that her description is true you may be certain.

GUSTAVE.

That I am!——But why did she take him?

ADOLPH.

Because she did not know him; and one cannot know oneself as well before as after marriage.

GUSTAVE.

Then one should not marry before one has married!——No, he was a tyrant, that goes without saying.

ADOLPH.

Goes without saying?

GUSTAVE.

All husbands are that (*coming nearer*) and you not the least!

ADOLPH.

I! I who let my wife come and go as she will?



GUSTAVE.

Yes, that is the least of all. Do you want to lock her up! But are you pleased when she goes out at night?

ADOLPH.

No, certainly not!

GUSTAVE.

See there! (*Changes his place.*) To tell the truth, that makes you almost ridiculous.

ADOLPH.

Ridiculous! Can one be ridiculous because one has confidence in one's wife?

GUSTAVE.

Certainly one can, and you are so already. Entirely so.

ADOLPH.

(*Convulsively.*)

That was the last thing I wanted to be, and it shall be different!

GUSTAVE.

Don't be so vehement, you will bring on another attack.

ADOLPH.

But why is she not ridiculous when I go out at night?

GUSTAVE.

Why? That does not concern you, but it is so; and while you puzzled over the reason the misfortune came.

ADOLPH.

What misfortune?

GUSTAVE.

Although her husband was a tyrant, she married him in order to be free; a woman only marries that way to use her husband as a cloak.

ADOLPH.

Naturally!

GUSTAVE.

And now you are the cloak.

ADOLPH.

I?

GUSTAVE.

Because you are the husband.

*(Adolph turns away.)*

GUSTAVE.

Am I not right?

ADOLPH.

*(Uneasily.)*

I don't know——One lives with a woman for years and thinks nothing about her or the relationship, and then—one begins to reflect—and then one's thoughts are in a whirl!——Gustave, you are my friend. You are the only male friend I have had. In these eight days you have given me back the courage to live. It seems as if your magnetism flows all through me. It seems as if you were a watchmaker who had repaired the works in my head and taken an obstruction out of them. Don't you find that I think clearer, speak clearer; I believe, at least, that my voice has recovered its ring.

GUSTAVE.

Yes, I notice it, too. How did that happen?

ADOLPH.

I don't know if it is due to my custom of speaking softly to women. Only a little while ago Thekla was always complaining that I shouted.

GUSTAVE.

And so you toned down your voice and tied yourself to her apron strings.

ADOLPH.

Don't call it that! (*Considers.*) Perhaps it is something worse!——But don't let us talk about that now!——Where was I?——Yes, you came here and you opened my eyes to the secrets of my art. For a long time I have been feeling my interest in painting wane, because it did not seem to furnish me the means of expressing what I wanted to express, but when you explained to me the foundation of phenomena, showing me why painting could not be a true form of artistic expression in modern days, then a light came to me and I saw that it would be absolutely impossible for me to continue producing in colors.

GUSTAVE.

Are you so certain that you can paint no longer; that there is no danger of your relapsing into your old ideas?

ADOLPH.

Absolutely!——For I have proved it! When I went to bed the evening after our conversation, I reviewed your reasoning point by point, and saw that it was correct. But when I awoke, and my head cleared after the night's sleep, the idea flashed into my brain that you might have erred. I sprang up and seized brushes and paint, but it was useless! I had no more illusion. There was nothing but spots of color and I wondered that I had ever believed, and talked others into believing, that a painted canvas could be anything else than



a painted canvas. The scales had fallen from my eyes and it was as impossible for me to paint as it would be for me to become a child again.

GUSTAVE.

So you realized that the real modern inspirations, the longing for realism and tangibility, can only find expression in sculpture, that is in creating bodies having the three dimensions.

ADOLPH.

*(Thoughtfully.)*

The three dimensions——Yes——In a word, bodies.

GUSTAVE.

So you became a sculptor. That is to say, you were one already, but you had gone astray and only needed a guide to bring you back into the right path. Tell me, are you happiest now when you are at work?

ADOLPH.

Then I live!

GUSTAVE.

May I see what you are making?

ADOLPH.

'A female figure.

GUSTAVE.

Without a model? And so lifelike!

ADOLPH.

(*Bluntly.*)

Yes, but it resembles someone! It is remarkable, that this woman seems to be a part of my body, as I seem to be part of hers!

GUSTAVE.

The last is not remarkable. Do you know what transfusion is?

ADOLPH.

Transfusion of blood? Yes.

GUSTAVE.

You appear to have let yourself be bled too much. But when I see this figure I understand things I had not suspected before. You have loved her inordinately.

ADOLPH.

Yes, so deeply that I cannot say if she is I, or I am she. When she laughs, I laugh; when she weeps, I weep; and when she gave birth to our child, can you believe it, I felt the birth pangs myself.

GUSTAVE.

Do you know, my friend, it grieves me to say it, but you are exhibiting the first symptoms of epilepsy.

ADOLPH.

*(Shudders.)*

I? How can you say that?

GUSTAVE.

Because I saw them in a younger brother who indulged his amoristic propensity to excess.

ADOLPH.

How——how did he exhibit that?

*(Gustave describes in vivid fashion. Adolph listens intently and unwillingly copies Gustave's gestures.)*

GUSTAVE.

It was frightful to witness, and if you feel weak, I will not plague you with a description.

ADOLPH.

*(With anxiety.)*

Go on, go on!

GUSTAVE.

Yes, the youngster married an innocent maiden with curls, the eyes of a dove, a childish face, and the soul of an angel. But it was not long before she began to assume the masculine prerogative.

ADOLPH.

What is that?

GUSTAVE.

The initiative, naturally, and with such success, that the angel came near landing him in heaven. First, however, he had to be stretched on the cross and feel the nails enter his flesh. It was horrible!

ADOLPH.

*(Breathless.)*

Well, how was it then?

GUSTAVE.

*(Slowly.)*

We might be sitting together, he and I——and when he had chatted for a while, his face would grow white as chalk; arms and legs would stiffen and his thumbs would turn in over his palms, so! (*Gesture, which Adolph repeats.*) Then his eyes would grow bloodshot and he would begin to chew, so! (*Chews, Adolph*

*copies him.)* The spittle rattled in his throat, his chest contracted as if pressed in a vice, his pupils flickered like gas jets, he frothed at the mouth and sank—sank—down—backward—in his chair as if he were drowning! Then——

ADOLPH.

Stop!

GUSTAVE.

Then——Are you ill?

ADOLPH.

Yes!

GUSTAVE.

*(Fetching a glass of water.)*

Here, drink this and we will talk about something else.

ADOLPH.

*(Feebly.)*

Thanks. But go on!

GUSTAVE.

Very well. When he came to he remembered nothing which had happened; he had been entirely unconscious. Were you ever that way?

ADOLPH.

Yes, at times I have had fainting spells, but the doctor said it was anaemia.

GUSTAVE.

Yes, you see that is the beginning! But you may believe me it will be epilepsy, if you don't take care.

ADOLPH.

What should I do?

GUSTAVE.

To begin with, you must observe absolute continence.

ADOLPH.

For how long?

GUSTAVE.

For half a year, at the very least.

ADOLPH.

I can't do that! It would disrupt our married life!

GUSTAVE.

Good-by to you, then!

•



ADOLPH.

*(Covers the wax figure with a cloth.)*

I can't do that!

GUSTAVE.

Can't save your life? But tell me, since you have given me so many confidences, are there no other wounds, not secret, that pain you? One seldom finds merely a single cause of discord, when life is so full of occasions for misunderstandings. Have you no skeleton in the closet which you hide from yourself? You said, for example, a while ago, that you had a child that you sent away. Why isn't he with you?

ADOLPH.

My wife doesn't want it so.

GUSTAVE.

And her motive? Name it!

ADOLPH.

Because when it was three years old it began to look too much like him——her first husband!

GUSTAVE.

Hm, hm! Did you ever see her first husband?

ADOLPH.

No, never! I had only a fleeting glance at a poor portrait, but I could see no likeness.

GUSTAVE.

No, portraits are not likenesses, and he may have changed his type later. However, that aroused no suspicion in you?

ADOLPH.

Certainly not! The child was born a year after our marriage, and her first husband had left before I met Thekla here—it was just here at this watering place, in this house even—that's the reason we come here every summer.

GUSTAVE.

Then you could not possibly have the smallest suspicion. Nor is there any reason why you should have. When a widow marries, her children by the second marriage often resemble her first husband. That is vexatious, undoubtedly, and that is why widows are burned in India, as you know.—Now, tell me, are you never jealous of him, or his remembrance. Would it not disgust you to meet him and hear him say, with his eyes on Thekla, “we,” instead of “I?”——“We?”

ADOLPH.

I must admit, that thought has pursued me!

GUSTAVE.

See there!—And you cannot escape from it! There are discords in life which can never be resolved! On account of them you must stop your ears with wax and work! Work, alter, lay masses of new impressions on the coffin lid, then the corpse will lie still.

ADOLPH.

Excuse my interrupting you! But—it is remarkable how much you resemble Thekla at times when you speak! You have a habit of half closing the right eye, as if you were shooting, and your glances have the same power over me that hers have at times.

GUSTAVE.

No, really?

ADOLPH.

And now you say “No, really” in the same indifferent tone she uses. She has a habit of saying “No, really” very often.

GUSTAVE.

Possibly we are distantly related; all people are related. It is odd, all the same, and it will be interesting for me to make your wife’s acquaintance in order to see it.

ADOLPH.

But, would you believe it, she has never taken an expression from me, rather has she reduced my vocab-

ulary, and never have I seen her copy a gesture of mine. Yet they say that married people grow to resemble one another!

GUSTAVE.

Yes, but do you know one thing? This woman has never loved you!

ADOLPH.

What?

GUSTAVE.

Yes! Pardon me, but you see it is the nature of woman's love to take and to receive. The man from whom a woman takes nothing, she does not love. She has never loved you!

ADOLPH.

Don't you believe that a woman can love more than once?

GUSTAVE.

No, one is cheated only once; afterward one keeps one's eyes open! You have never been deceived; therefore, you must take heed of those who have been! They are dangerous!

ADOLPH.

Your words pierce me like knives, and I feel as if something were being cut in half, but I can't hinder it, and it is good that it can be cut; there are some ulcers that will never ripen and burst!—She has never loved me!—Why did she take me then?

GUSTAVE.

First tell me how she came to take you, and whether you took her or she took you.

ADOLPH.

God knows if I can answer that! How did it happen! It did not happen in a day!

GUSTAVE.

Shall I try and tell you how it came about?

ADOLPH.

You can't do that!

GUSTAVE.

Oh, with the disclosures you have given me concerning you and your wife I can construct the episode. Listen and you shall hear it. (*Dispassionately, almost jestingly.*) The husband had gone on a journey and she was alone. First she felt a desire to be free; then came loneliness; for I take it she felt somewhat lonely after she had lived by herself for a fortnight. Then he came and filled the empty place in her life little by little. At the same time, the absent one began to fade, for the simple reason that he was at a distance.—You know diffusion is as the square of the distance.—But when they found their passion awakening they became uneasy about themselves, about their consciences, and about him. They sought protection and crawled be-

hind the fig leaves, played brother and sister, and the more carnal became their feelings, the more they attempted to idealize their relationship into a spiritual one!

ADOLPH.

Brother and sister? How do you know that?

GUSTAVE.

I divined it! Children like to play papa and mama, but when they grow older they play brother and sister—in order to hide what should be hidden!—Then they put aside their vows of chastity—and then they played hide and seek—until they found themselves in a dark corner where they were sure that nobody saw them. (*With playful strength.*) But they felt as if some one looked at them through the darkness—and they were frightened—and in their fright the figure of the absent one began to haunt them—to assume dimensions—to change its form; now it was a goblin that disturbed their dream of love, now a creditor that knocked at the door, and they saw his black hand between their own when they dipped into the dish, and they heard his unpleasant voice in the silence of the night, that should have been disturbed only by pulse beats. He did not hinder their possessing each other, but he disturbed their happiness. And when they realized how his invisible power disturbed their happiness; when finally they eloped; they fled vainly from the remembrance which followed them, from the guilt they had left behind and the public opinion which



frightened them; and they had not the strength to bear their guilt, so a scape-goat had to be brought in from the fields and slaughtered. They were freethinkers, but they did not dare go back and say to him boldly and openly "we love each other." They were cowardly and, therefore, the tyrant had to be murdered! Is that correct?

ADOLPH.

Yes! But you forget that she made me, gave me new thoughts——

GUSTAVE.

I don't forget it! But tell me, how came it that she did not turn the other into a freethinker?

ADOLPH.

He was an idiot!

GUSTAVE.

That is true, he was an idiot! But that is a very ambiguous point, in her novel his idiocy is exhibited chiefly by the fact that he did not understand her. Pardon me, but is your wife really such a deep thinker? I have found nothing very deep in her writings.

ADOLPH.

Neither have I! But, I must own that it is very difficult for me, too, to understand her. It is as if the mechanism in our brains could not couple, as if some-

thing in my head gave way when I try to understand her.

GUSTAVE.

Possibly you also are an idiot?

ADOLPH.

No, I don't believe that. And I find almost always that she is wrong.—Read this letter, for example, which I received to-day. (*Takes letter from his pocket.*)

GUSTAVE.

(*Reading hastily.*)

Hm, this style seems so familiar.

ADOLPH.

Masculine, almost?

GUSTAVE.

Yes. At least, I have seen a man whose writing was similar! She addresses you as "brother." Do you still play a comedy for your own benefit? The fig leaves are kept in place even if they are withered. Why are you not more familiar?

ADOLPH.

Because I feel that familiarity would lessen respect.

GUSTAVE.

Ah, then she calls herself "sister" in order to instil respect?

ADOLPH.

I want to respect her more than I do myself, want her to be my better self.

GUSTAVE.

Be your own better self! It is safer, probably, than letting someone else be it. Do you want to be less important than your wife?

ADOLPH.

Yes, I do! It rejoices me to be just a little less able than she is. For example, I taught her how to swim, and now it rather pleases me when she boasts that she swims better than I do. In the beginning I pretended to be less skillful, to be more cowardly than she, that I might give her courage, but one day I found that I was really the inferior and the coward. Actually, it seemed to me as if she had taken my courage from me!

GUSTAVE.

Did you teach her anything else?

ADOLPH.

Yes, but this is in confidence, I taught her to write correctly, she couldn't do it before. But, now listen,

when she began to attend to the household correspondence I stopped writing and, would you believe it, having ceased to use it, I find that I have forgotten my grammar here and there. She thinks, though, that it was she who taught me in the beginning. Surely, I am the idiot now!

GUSTAVE.

Aha, you are the idiot now, certainly!

ADOLPH.

You are jesting, of course!

GUSTAVE.

Oh, of course! But this is cannibalism! Do you know what that is? Savages eat their enemies to absorb the courage of their dead foemen!—She has devoured your soul, this woman; your courage, your knowledge——

ADOLPH.

And my faith!—I drove her to write her first book——

GUSTAVE.

*(Expressively.)*

Indeed?

ADOLPH.

I encouraged her with praise, even when I considered her work inadequate.—I introduced her to lit-

erary circles where she could gather the honey of inspiration. I protected her from adverse criticism, I blew the embers of her belief in herself; I blew so long that I lost my breath! I gave, I gave, I gave——until I had nothing left. Do you know—now I will tell everything—I went so far—the soul is so strange—as to sacrifice my own art and to belittle my own reputation, when I found my artistic fame was apt to overshadow hers. I spoke so long about the unimportant rôle played by painting when compared to the other arts that one fine day I convinced myself of its worthlessness; so, after all, you have only blown down a house of cards!

GUSTAVE.

Pardon me for reminding you that in the beginning of our conversation you asserted that she never took anything from you.

ADOLPH.

Never at present! There is nothing left to take!

GUSTAVE.

The snake is gorged and now she vomits!

ADOLPH.

Possibly she has taken more from me than I realized!

GUSTAVE.

You may depend upon that. She took without your seeing and that is what one calls stealing.

ADOLPH.

Possibly she taught me nothing?

GUSTAVE.

But you taught her everything! Undoubtedly. But her cunning made you believe the contrary! May I ask how she began to teach you?

ADOLPH.

Certainly! In the first place——hm!

GUSTAVE.

Well?

ADOLPH.

Yes, I——

GUSTAVE.

No, it was she!

ADOLPH.

Yes, I can tell you about it no longer!

GUSTAVE.

Now, you see!

ADOLPH.

However,——she devoured my faith, and so I retrograded until you came along and gave me new faith.

GUSTAVE.

*(Laughing.)*

In sculpture?

ADOLPH.

*(Faintly.)*

Yes!

GUSTAVE.

And you believe in it! In this obsolete art belonging to the childhood of the world? You believe you can present the true thought of the present with pure form, with the three dimensions? To create illusions without color, without color, do you hear! Do you believe that?

ADOLPH.

*(Crushed.)*

No!

GUSTAVE.

Nor do I!

ADOLPH.

Why did you say so then?

GUSTAVE.

It was a pity!

ADOLPH.

Yes, it was a pity for me! Now I am bankrupt, I am at an end!—And the worst of it is that I have her no longer!



GUSTAVE.

What do you want with her?

ADOLPH.

She has become to me what God was to me before I became an atheist; an object for the exercise of veneration——

GUSTAVE.

Throw aside your veneration and cultivate something in its place! A little healthy scorn, for example!

ADOLPH.

I cannot live without esteeming something.

GUSTAVE.

Slave!

ADOLPH.

And without a woman to esteem, to honor.

GUSTAVE.

Phew! The devil! Then God have mercy on you!——You who insist on having something before which to make the sign of the cross. An atheist with feminine superstitions! A freethinker who cannot think freely about women! Do you know what your

wife's incomprehensibility, her sphinx-like quality, her depth of mind really is!—Nothing but stupidity!—See here, she can't tell the difference between d and t; And, mark you, there is a fault in her mechanism. The case is that of a clock, but the works are those of a watch! The clothes! Nothing but the clothes. Put her in trowsers and mark a moustache under her nose with a piece of charcoal, then listen to her with an unmuddled brain, and you will hear how different it all sounds. Only a phonograph which repeats your words—and the words of others—a little bit toned down! Have you seen a naked woman?—Yes, of course! A youth with teats on the breast, an undeveloped man, a child that has been shut up and stunted in its growth, a chronically anaemic being that has regular hemorrhages thirteen times a year! What can one expect from that?

ADOLPH.

What you say may all be true, but then how can I believe that we are like each other?

GUSTAVE.

Hallucination, the result of the clothes! Or, possibly, because you have become like her. The leveling has been accomplished. Her capillary attraction has sucked up the water until its level is the same in both of you. But (*looking at his watch*) we have been talking now for six hours and your wife must soon be

here, we had better stop now, in order that you may rest a little.

ADOLPH.

No, don't leave me! I cannot bear to be alone!

GUSTAVE.

Oh, only a little while and your wife will be here!

ADOLPH.

Yes, she is coming!—How wonderful! I long for her, and yet I am afraid of her. She caresses me, she is tender, yet there is something suffocating in her kisses, something which sucks out my life. And it seems to me as if I were a child in the circus which the clown pinches back of the scenes that it may appear rosy before the public.

GUSTAVE.

My friend, I am sorry for you! Although I am not a physician, I can tell very well that you are dying. It is only necessary to look at your last picture to confirm that diagnosis.

ADOLPH.

What are you saying? How can that be?

GUSTAVE.

Your coloring is so thin and weak and watery that the tone of the canvas shows through it. I seem to see your sunken, putty-colored cheeks looking out from it.

ADOLPH.

Stop! Stop!

GUSTAVE.

But this is not my personal opinion alone. Have you read to-day's newspapers?

ADOLPH.

*(Gathering himself together.)*

No!

GUSTAVE.

They are here on the table.

ADOLPH.

*(Reaches for the newspaper as if he did not dare touch it.)*

Is it there?

GUSTAVE.

Read! Or shall I read it to you?

ADOLPH.

No! No! No!——I don't know——I believe I am beginning to hate you, and yet I cannot let you go. You released me from my swaddlings, but when I came out happily you hit me on the head and bound me up again! As long as I kept my secret to myself I had bowels, but now I am empty. There is a picture by an

Italian master which represents a torture chamber in which a saint is having his intestines wound out of him on a capstan. The martyr lies there and sees himself growing thinner and thinner and the roll on the reel growing ever thicker!—So, I believe you have disemboweled me, and when you go you will take my entrails with you and leave a mere shell behind.

GUSTAVE.

Oh, how you fancy things!—Besides, isn't your wife coming home with your heart?

ADOLPH.

No. She has it no longer, since you branded her in my sight. You have left everything in ashes behind you, my art, my love, my hope, my faith!

GUSTAVE.

Practically, they were gone before.

ADOLPH.

Yes, but they might have been resuscitated! Now it is too late, you incendiary!

GUSTAVE.

We have only burned away the underbrush. Now we can sow in the ashes.

ADOLPH.

I hate you! I curse you!

GUSTAVE.

A good sign! You still have some strength! Now I shall lift you up again! Listen to me! Will you listen to me and obey me?

ADOLPH.

Do with me what you will! I will obey!

GUSTAVE.

*(Rising.)*

Look at me!

ADOLPH.

*(Looking at Gustave.)*

Now you are looking at me again with those eyes that draw me to you!

GUSTAVE.

Now, listen to me!

ADOLPH.

Yes, but speak of yourself! Speak of me no longer; I am like a wounded man and can find no tranquility.

GUSTAVE.

No, there is nothing to say about myself! I am pro-

fessor of dead languages and a widower, that is all!——  
Take my hand!

ADOLPH.

What frightful strength you must have. It is as if  
one grasped an electric battery.

GUSTAVE.

And remember that once I was just as weak as you  
are now!——Get up!

ADOLPH.

*(Rises and falls on Gustave's neck.)*

I am like a boneless child and my brain is empty!

GUSTAVE.

Walk about the room!

ADOLPH.

I can't!

GUSTAVE.

You shall or I will beat you!

ADOLPH.

*(Righting himself.)*

What do you say?



GUSTAVE.

I will strike you, I said.

ADOLPH.

*(Springing backward angrily.)*

You!

GUSTAVE.

You see! Now your blood is in your head and your self consciousness has awakened! Now I will give you some magnetism. Where is your wife?

ADOLPH.

Where is she?

GUSTAVE.

Yes!

ADOLPH.

She is——at——a meeting!

GUSTAVE.

Is that certain!

ADOLPH.

Absolutely!

GUSTAVE.

What kind of a meeting?

ADOLPH.

For the founding of a children's home.

GUSTAVE.

Did you part as friends?

ADOLPH.

*(Uneasily.)*

Well, not as enemies.

GUSTAVE.

As enemies then!——You irritated her?

ADOLPH.

You are frightful! I am afraid of you! How can you know?

GUSTAVE.

I have three facts and I simply calculate the unknown from them!——What did you say to her?

ADOLPH.

I said——it was only two words, but they were dreadful and I regret them, I regret them!

GUSTAVE.

You must not do that!——Repeat them!

ADOLPH.

I said "Old coquette!"

GUSTAVE.

And then?

ADOLPH.

I said nothing more.

GUSTAVE.

Yes, you did, but you have forgotten; probably because you did not want to remember! You have hidden it in forgetfulness, but recall it now.

ADOLPH.

I cannot recollect!

GUSTAVE.

But I know! You said: "You ought to be ashamed to flirt, you who are so old that you can find lovers no longer!"

ADOLPH.

Did I say that? I must have said that!—But how can you know?

GUSTAVE.

I heard her tell the story on the steamboat which brought me here.

ADOLPH.

To whom?

GUSTAVE.

To four young men who accompanied her! She still longs for the very young just as——

ADOLPH.

That is very innocent!

GUSTAVE.

Just as one plays brother and sister when one is papa and mama!

ADOLPH.

You have seen her then?

GUSTAVE.

Yes, I have! But you have never seen her when you did not see her! I mean when you were not present! And see here, that's the reason why a man really never sees his wife! Have you a picture of her?

*(Adolph takes a picture out of his breast pocket.)*

GUSTAVE.

You were not with her when this was taken?

ADOLPH.

No.

GUSTAVE.

Look at this! Is it like the portrait you painted of her?—No! The features are the same, but the expression is different. But you did not see that because you had your own picture in your mind!—Look at this as a painter, without thinking of the original!—What does it look like? I can see nothing but a made-up coquette, made up for conquest. Look at this cynical line about the mouth, which you seem to have overlooked; see how the eyes are seeking a man who is not there; see how the dress is cut away; how the hair has been combed and combed again; how the sleeves have been pushed up high? Do you see?

ADOLPH.

Yes——now I see it all!

GUSTAVE.

Take care to protect yourself, young man!

ADOLPH

From what?

GUSTAVE.

From her revenge! Remember how you wounded her in her most vulnerable spot by saying that she can attract a man no longer. If you had said that her writings were trash she would have laughed at your poor

taste, but now——believe me, if she has not revenged herself already it is not her fault.

ADOLPH.

Must I suffer that!

GUSTAVE.

Seek to gain by it!

ADOLPH.

Seek to gain by it!

GUSTAVE.

Look to it. I will help you, if you like.

ADOLPH.

Yes, as I have to die it might as well be sooner as later!——What is to be done?

GUSTAVE.

First, some information. Has your wife a single vulnerable point?

ADOLPH.

Scarcely! She must have nine lives, like a cat!

GUSTAVE.

Indeed!——There is the steamer whistling in the dock. She will be here presently.

ADOLPH.

Then I must go down and meet her!

GUSTAVE.

No, you must stop here. You must be rude! If she has a clean conscience, you will find a shower of hail about your ears; if she is guilty, she will come and caress you!

ADOLPH.

Are you sure of this?

GUSTAVE.

Not entirely, for at times the hare turns hunter and sets traps. But I will soon get you out of them. My room is next to this. (*Points to the door on the right behind the chair.*) I will post myself there and watch while you play your part here. Then, when you are exhausted, we will change the rôles; I will go into the cage and work with the snake while you look through the keyhole. Afterward we will meet in the park and compare notes. But be a man! If I see you weakening I will knock twice with a chair on the floor.

ADOLPH.

That's arranged! But do not go out, I must be sure that you are in the next room!

GUSTAVE.

You may be certain of that——But don't be frightened later on when you see me dissect a human soul and lay its entrails out here on the table; it gives a beginner the shudders, but when one has seen it once it worries one no longer!——Remember one thing! Not a word that you have met me, or even that you have made an acquaintance during her absence! Not a word! Her weak point I will discover myself! Silence! There she is already, overhead in your room! She is singing to herself! Then she is off her guard!——So, with the back just so; sit on your own chair, then she will have to sit on mine, and then I can see both of you at once!

ADOLPH.

It is an hour yet to noon.——No visitors have come, for the bell has not rung.——So we shall be alone——unfortunately!

GUSTAVE.

Are you weak?

ADOLPH.

I am not!——But I am afraid of what is coming. The stone rolls, but it was not the last drop of water that loosened it from its foundations, nor was it the first—it was all of them together!

GUSTAVE.

Let it roll then——honor will not allow it to rest.——Good-by for a while! (*Goes.*)



*(Adolph nods good-by; tears in half the photograph he has been holding and throws the pieces under the table; then sits down in the chair, fingers his collar nervously; fumbles with the lapels of his coat, etc.)*

THEKLA.

*(Enters, goes directly to him and kisses him in friendly, open, joyous, and captivating fashion.)*

Good-morning, little brother! How are you?

ADOLPH.

*(Half conquered, struggling to resist, jokingly.)*  
What have you been doing bad that you kiss me?

THEKLA.

You shall hear about it! I have squandered a frightful amount of money!

ADOLPH.

Was it interesting?

THEKLA.

Very! But I'll tell you about the meeting later——  
How has little brother amused himself while his wife was absent? *(Looks about the room as if she sought someone or scented something.)*

ADOLPH.

I have only been bored with loneliness.

THEKLA.

And no visitors?

ADOLPH.

Entirely alone!

THEKLA.

*(Observes him critically. Sits down in the chaise longue.)*

Who has been sitting here?

ADOLPH.

There? Nobody!

THEKLA.

That is peculiar. The seat is still warm and here in the arm cushion is still the hollow made by an elbow! Have you been entertaining a woman?

ADOLPH.

You don't believe that yourself!

THEKLA.

But you are blushing! I believe little brother is flunking?—Come and tell his wife what he has in his thoughts! *(Draws him to her. He sinks down with his head on her knee.)*

ADOLPH.

*(Laughing.)*

You are a little devil, do you know that?

THEKLA.

No, I know myself so little.

ADOLPH.

You never think about yourself.

THEKLA.

*(On her guard and observant.)*

I think only of myself—I am frightfully egotistical!—But how philosophic you have become!

ADOLPH.

Lay your hand on my forehead.

THEKLA.

*(Playfully.)*

Are the ants in his head again? Shall I chase them out? *(Kisses his forehead.)* There! Is that good?

ADOLPH.

It is good!

(*Pause.*)

THEKLA.

Tell me how you have employed your time. Painted anything?

ADOLPH.

No, I have given up painting.

THEKLA.

What? You have given up painting?

ADOLPH.

Yes, but don't quarrel with me about that. I can't help that I can paint no longer.

THEKLA.

Then what will you do?

ADOLPH.

I shall become a sculptor!

THEKLA.

So many new ideas!

ADOLPH.

Yes, but don't dispute them now. Look at this figure!

THEKLA.

*(Examining the wax figure.)*

Only see that! Who is it?

ADOLPH.

Guess!

THEKLA.

*(Softly.)*

Is that intended for his wife? Isn't he ashamed of himself!

ADOLPH.

Isn't it like her?

THEKLA.

How can I tell, when it has no face.

ADOLPH.

Yes, but it has so much else that is——beautiful!

THEKLA.

*(Strokes him caressingly on the cheek.)*

He must hold his tongue, or I will kiss him.

ADOLPH.

*(Drawing back.)*

No, no, somebody might come in!

THEKLA.

What's that to me! Is it possible that I may not kiss my own husband. That is my legal right.

ADOLPH.

Yes, but do you know one thing? They think here in the hotel that we are not married because we kiss each other so often! Our occasional quarrels do not shake their belief, because lovers quarrel, too!

THEKLA.

But why must we quarrel? Can't he always be as good as he is now? Answer! Doesn't he want to? Wouldn't he like us to be happy?

ADOLPH.

Wouldn't he like it! But——

THEKLA.

Well, what is it now? Who has put it into his head not to paint?

ADOLPH.

Who? You are always suspecting that somebody is behind me and my thoughts! You are jealous!

THEKLA.

Yes, I am indeed! I am afraid that somebody will come and take you away from me!

ADOLPH.

You are afraid of that, when you know that no woman could replace you, and that without you I could not live!

THEKLA.

No, I'm not afraid of women, but of strangers that might take everything from you!

ADOLPH.

*(Scrutinizing her.)*

You are afraid of them—of whom are you afraid?

THEKLA.

*(Rising.)*

Somebody has been here! Who has been here?

ADOLPH.

Don't you want me to look at you?

THEKLA.

Not in that way, you are not used to look at me so!

ADOLPH.

How am I looking at you?

THEKLA.

You look under your eyelids——

ADOLPH.

Under yours! Yes! I want to see what is behind them!

THEKLA.

Well, see! There is nothing which has to be hidden.——But——you speak differently also——you use expressions——(*inquisitively*)——you philosophise——you? (*Goes threatenly up to him.*) Who has been here?

ADOLPH.

Nobody but my doctor!



THEKLA.

Your doctor! Who is your doctor?

ADOLPH.

The doctor from Strömstad.

THEKLA.

What's his name?

ADOLPH.

Sjöberg.

THEKLA.

What does he say?

ADOLPH.

He says——yes,——he said, among other things,  
that I was on the verge of epilepsy——

THEKLA.

Among other things? What else did he say?

ADOLPH.

It was something very unpleasant!

THEKLA.

Tell me!

ADOLPH.

He forbade us to live together as husband and wife  
for a very long time.

THEKLA.

See there, didn't I think so! Somebody wants to part us! I have known that for a long time!

ADOLPH.

You couldn't have, because it was not so until now!

THEKLA.

Haven't I?

ADOLPH.

How can you see what is not present, unless fear works so upon your imagination that you see what does not exist. What frightens you? Are you afraid that I may borrow the eyes of another, in order to see you as you really are, and not as you appear to be to me?

THEKLA.

Hold your phantasy in check, Adolph! That is the beast in the human soul.

ADOLPH.

Where have you learned that? From the young men on the steamboat? What?

THEKLA.

*(Without losing her composure.)*

Yes, one can often learn from the young.

ADOLPH.

I believe you are beginning to fall in love with young men!

THEKLA.

I have done so already, and that's the way I won your love. Have you anything against that?

ADOLPH.

No, but I had rather be the only one!

THEKLA.

*(Babbling jokingly.)*

My heart is so big, little brother, that there is room in it for many, not only for him.

ADOLPH.

But little brother doesn't want any more brothers!

THEKLA.

Come to his wife then. He shall be torn to pieces because he is jealous——no, envious is the right word!

*(Two thuds with a chair are heard from Gustave's room.)*

ADOLPH.

No, I don't want to play; I want to talk seriously!

THEKLA.

*(Babbling.)*

Lord, he wants to talk seriously! It is frightful how earnest he has become. *(Takes him by the head and kisses him.)* He must laugh a little!—So,—yes!

ADOLPH.

*(Laughing unwillingly.)*

You fascinating creature, I really believe you can bewitch!

THEKLA.

Does he think so! Then he mustn't grumble, or I will cast a spell over him.

ADOLPH.

*(Standing.)*

Thekla, stand for a minute with your profile toward me and I will put the face on your figure.

THEKLA.

Very well. *(Turns her profile toward him.)*

ADOLPH.

*(Looks fixedly at her, pretends to be modeling.)*

Don't think about me now. Think about someone else.

THEKLA.

I will think about my last conquest.

ADOLPH.

The callow youth?

THEKLA.

Just of him!—He had such a sweet little mustache, and his cheeks were like peaches, they were so tender and delicate that one felt like biting them!

ADOLPH.

*(Darkly.)*

Hold that expression of the mouth!

THEKLA.

What expression?

ADOLPH.

That cynical, shameless expression I have never seen there before!

THEKLA.

*(Makes a grimace.)*

This one?

ADOLPH.

Just that! (*Starting.*) Do you know how Bret Harte depicts an adulteress?

THEKLA.

(*Laughing.*)

No! I have never read Bret What's-his-name!

ADOLPH.

She is a pale woman who never blushes!

THEKLA.

Never! When she gets her lover she will blush, even if he and Mr. Bret don't see it.

ADOLPH.

You are that way then?

THEKLA.

Yes, if the man can't drive the blood to her head he misses the prettiest sight!

ADOLPH.

(*Furious.*)

Thekla!

THEKLA.

Little stupid!

ADOLPH.

Thekla!

THEKLA.

He must say "wife," then I will blush for him prettily! Shall I? Tell me.

ADOLPH.

*(Disarmed.)*

I am so angry with you, you little beast, that I want to bite you!

THEKLA.

*(Acting.)*

Come then and bite me!—Come! *(Opens her arms for him.)*

ADOLPH.

*(Taking her about the neck and kissing her.)*

I will bite you so that you will die!

THEKLA.

*(Teasingly.)*

Take care, somebody might **come**!

ADOLPH.

What is that to me! I care nothing about the whole world so long as I have you!

THEKLA.

'And if you should lose me?

ADOLPH.

Then I should die!

THEKLA.

Yes, but you aren't afraid, because I am so old that nobody will take me!

ADOLPH.

Thekla, you have not forgotten my words! I take them back now!

THEKLA.

Can you explain why you are so jealous and yet feel so secure of me at the same time?

ADOLPH.

No, I cannot explain it. But it is possible that the thought that another has had you lies in me and germinates. At times it seems to me as if all our love were a poem, a defense, a passion turned into an affair of honor; and I do not know what would torment me more



than for him to know that I am unhappy. Ah, I have never seen him, but the thought that a man exists who sits and waits for my unhappiness; who curses me daily, and who will laugh aloud when I fall; the idea of this obsesses me, drives me to you, fascinates me, lames me!

THEKLA.

Do you believe that I would permit him that happiness. Do you believe that I should like to see his prophecy fulfilled?

ADOLPH.

No, I don't want to believe that!

THEKLA.

Then cannot you be tranquil in mind?

ADOLPH.

No, you disturb me constantly with your coquettishness! Why do you act that comedy?

THEKLA.

It is no comedy. I want to be loved, that is all.

ADOLPH.

Yes, but only by the men!

THEKLA.

Naturally! For, you know, a woman can never be loved by women!

ADOLPH.

Tell me!——Have you heard—from him lately?

THEKLA.

Not since half a year ago.

ADOLPH.

Don't you think of him?

THEKLA.

No!——Since the child died we have had no communication with each other.

ADOLPH.

And you have not even seen him on the street?

THEKLA.

No. He must have moved to some other place. But why are you bothering your head about such trifles?

ADOLPH.

I don't know. But the last day that I was alone I kept thinking how lonely he must have felt when he found himself alone.

THEKLA.

I believe you have qualms of conscience!

ADOLPH.

Yes!

THEKLA.

You feel as if you were a thief, don't you?

ADOLPH.

Almost!

THEKLA.

That is charming! Women can be stolen just like children and chickens! You look upon me as his personal goods and chattles! Thank you very much!

ADOLPH.

No, I regard you as his wife! And that is more than mere property! That cannot be paid for!

THEKLA.

Ah, prove it! If you heard that he had married again all your worry would stop!—You compensate me for his loss!

ADOLPH.

Have I done so?—Did you love him?

THEKLA.

Certainly I did!

ADOLPH.

And then——

THEKLA.

I became tired of him!

ADOLPH.

Think, you may become tired of me!

THEKLA.

That I shall never be!

ADOLPH.

If another should come who embodied, or even assumed the characteristics that you now look for in a man! Then you would leave me!

THEKLA.

No!

ADOLPH.

Suppose he fascinated you so that you could not leave him; then, naturally, you would leave me!

THEKLA.

No, that is not certain!

ADOLPH.

You cannot love two at the same time?

THEKLA.

Why not?

ADOLPH.

I don't understand it!

THEKLA.

But a thing can exist whether you understand it or not. All people are not created the same!

ADOLPH.

Now I begin to understand!

THEKLA.

No, really!

ADOLPH.

No, really! (*Pause during which Adolph appears to attempt to recall something, but without success.*)  
Thekla, do you know your candor begins to be tormenting.

THEKLA.

And yet candor is your greatest virtue, and the one you taught me!

ADOLPH.

Yes, but it seems to me as if you hid behind this candor!

THEKLA.

That's the new school of tactics, you see!

ADOLPH.

I don't know why, but I am growing uncomfortable in this place. Suppose we journey homeward this evening!

THEKLA.

What an idea! I've just arrived and have no desire to travel again!

ADOLPH.

But I want to!

THEKLA.

What difference does that make to me, what you want!——Travel alone!

ADOLPH.

Now I command you to take the next steamer with me!

THEKLA.

Command! What kind of talk is that?

ADOLPH.

Do you forget that you are my wife?

THEKLA.

Do you forget that you are my husband?

ADOLPH.

There is a difference between the one and the other!

THEKLA.

Aha, do you speak in that tone!—You have never loved me!

ADOLPH.

No?

THEKLA.

No, loving is giving!

ADOLPH.

A man's love consists in giving; a woman's, in taking!  
And I have given, given, given!

THEKLA.

What have you given?

ADOLPH.

Everything!

THEKLA.

That is too much! And if it were true, I have taken it. Do you want to bring in a bill for your presents? And if I have taken, I have showed thereby that I loved you! A woman takes presents only from her lover!

ADOLPH.

Lover! Yes! There you speak the truth. I have been your lover, but never your husband!

THEKLA.

It would be so much pleasanter to go without a cloak! —But, if you are not satisfied with your position, you may take your leave. I don't want any husband!

ADOLPH.

So I have noticed! Only the other day I saw how you shrank away from me like a thief, in order to move in other company, where you could shine in my feathers and sparkle in my jewels. That's why I reminded you of your debt. That's why I changed into the unpleasant creditor one wants most to keep at a distance.



That's why you want to turn the tables and seek other shrines than mine, so as not to increase your debt to me! It was against my will that I became your husband and, therefore, you hate me! Now I will be your husband, whether you like it or not, because I dare not be your lover!

THEKLA.

*(Coquettishly.)*

Don't talk such nonsense, you little idiot!

ADOLPH.

It is dangerous to believe that everybody is an idiot except oneself!

THEKLA.

But everybody believes that a little bit!

ADOLPH.

And I am beginning to suspect that he—your former husband—might not have been an idiot!

THEKLA.

Oh, Lord! I believe you are beginning to sympathize with him!

ADOLPH.

Yes, nearly!

THEKLA.

See there!—You would like to make his acquaintance, possibly to pour out your whole heart to him! What lovely husbands!—But I myself begin to feel drawn to him; I am tired of being a child's nurse. He was a man, at least, even if he had the disadvantage of being my own!

ADOLPH.

Do you see!—But we must not speak so loud, somebody might hear us!

THEKLA.

What difference does that make if they think we are married?

ADOLPH.

Then you begin to hanker for the manly men, as well as for the very young.

THEKLA.

My longing has no limits, as you see, and my heart is open to all, large and small, handsome and ugly, young and old. I love the whole world!

ADOLPH.

Do you know what that means?

THEKLA.

No, I don't know anything, I only feel!

ADOLPH.

It means that you are old!

THEKLA.

Are you at that again! Take care!

ADOLPH.

Take care, yourself!

THEKLA.

Of what?

ADOLPH.

Of my knife!

THEKLA.

*(Babbling.)*

Little brother must not play with such dangerous things!

ADOLPH.

I am playing no longer!

THEKLA.

So, so, you are in earnest! Entirely in earnest. Then I will show you—that you are mistaken! That

is—you will not see it, you will not comprehend it, but the whole world shall know it; all will suspect it, will guess it, and you will never have another peaceful hour. You will feel that you are laughed at, that you are deceived, but you will never be able to lay your hands on the evidence; a husband can never do that! That's what you can learn!

ADOLPH.

You hate me?

THEKLA.

No, that I don't, and I don't believe I ever should. Possibly because you are a child!

ADOLPH.

Yes, now! But do you remember when we weathered the storm! Then you lay like a baby and cried; then I had to hold you in my arms and had to kiss your eyes to sleep. Then I was the nurse. I had to see that you didn't go about unkempt; had to send your shoes to the cobbler's; had to attend to the marketing even! I had to sit beside you and hold your hand for hours at a time, because you were afraid, afraid of the whole world, because you had not a friend left and public opinion was against you. I had to talk encouragingly to you until my tongue was dry and my head was aching; I had to sit there and force myself to be strong; to compel myself to believe in the future. Then I succeeded in bringing you back to life, you who had lain like one dead! Then you admired me. Then I was

your man indeed, not that athlete whom you had left, but a strong-souled magnetizer, whose will power flowed into your weak muscles and induced new thoughts to fill your empty brain. And so I consoled you, provided you with friends, created a little court where you could be admired, set you over me and over my house. Then I used you as a model for my best pictures, painted you in rose and azure against a golden background, and there was no exhibition at which your face did not appear upon the line. Now you were Saint Cæcilia, now Mary Stuart, now this or that heroine of history, and I awakened interest in you and fairly drove the masses into seeing you with my infatuated eyes. I pushed forward your personality until you had won general sympathy—and could walk alone!

When you were able to do that, my strength was at an end and I collapsed from over-exertion—I had helped you up and had fallen myself. I became sick, and my sickness wearied you, just when life began to smile for you again—and at times it seems to me that you longed secretly to rid yourself of me, as a creditor and as a witness of your weakness. Your love began to assume the character of that of an elder sister and, in fault of a better, I accustomed myself to the rôle of little brother. Your fondness for me is still alive, even stronger than before, but it is mixed with a measure of compassion and a considerable amount of contempt, which rises to scorn as my talent declines and your sun rises.

But, it appears, your well spring of inspiration is drying up, now that I can serve as it no longer, or, to speak more correctly, since you do not wish it known

that you drew from me. And now you must have somebody who can be responsible for your fault. A new one! Because you are too weak to carry a debt of sin on your own shoulders I was made the scapegoat that had to be cut up alive! But, as you cut through my nerves, you did not realize that you were mutilating yourself, that we had grown to be like twins, so that what hurt one injured the other. You were a sprout from my bush, but you wanted your sprout to flower before it had roots, and, therefore, you cannot grow by yourself. On the other hand, the original plant cannot survive the loss of its limb—and thus both are dying!

THEKLA.

By all this you want to say that you wrote my book!

ADOLPH.

No. You want me to say that in order to trap me into a lie—I do not express myself as crudely as you do, and I have spoken for five minutes in order to include all the nuances, all the halftones, all the overtones. Your lyre has but one tone!

THEKLA.

Yes, yes, but the sum of all this is that you wrote my book?

ADOLPH.

No, it has no resumé! You can't make a chord from

one tone, you can't find a simple arithmetical formula for a variagated life. I have said nothing so lame as that I have written your book!

THEKLA.

But that is what you mean!

ADOLPH.

*(Beside himself.)*

I didn't mean that!

THEKLA.

But the sum——

ADOLPH.

*(Wildly.)*

There can be no sum when one does not add; there is a quotient, a long endless row of decimal figures as a quotient, when one divides, and the result is uneven. I have not added!

THEKLA.

No, but I can add!

ADOLPH.

I believe it of you, but I haven't done so!

THEKLA.

But you wanted to do it!

ADOLPH.

*(Helplessly closing his eyes.)*

No! no! no!—speak to me no longer!—I shall have a convulsion!—Keep still! Go away! You are ruining my brain with your torturer's pincers! You stick your teeth into my thoughts and tear them to pieces. *(Becomes unconscious, stares before him, and turns his thumbs inward.)*

THEKLA.

*(Tenderly.)*

What's the matter with you? Are you ill?—Adolph!

*(Adolph turns away.)*

THEKLA.

Adolph!

*(Adolph shakes his head.)*

THEKLA.

Adolph!

ADOLPH.

Yes!

THEKLA.

Do you see how wrong you were just now?



ADOLPH.

Yes, yes, yes, yes, I see!

THEKLA.

And do you ask my pardon?

ADOLPH.

Yes, yes, I ask your pardon! Now don't say anything more to me!

THEKLA.

Kiss my hand!

ADOLPH.

*(Kisses her hand.)*

I have kissed your hand! Now don't say anything more to me!

THEKLA.

Now go out of doors and breathe fresh air until noon!

ADOLPH.

Yes, I need some! Then we will pack up and leave here!

THEKLA.

No!

ADOLPH.

(*Going.*)

Why not? You must have a reason!

THEKLA.

For the reason that I have promised to take part in a soiree to-day.

ADOLPH.

That's why, then!

THEKLA.

That's why! That's why! I have promised to be there——

ADOLPH.

Promised. You said possibly you expected to be there and that does not hinder you now from saying that you expect not to be there.

THEKLA.

No, I am not like you, I keep my word!

ADOLPH.

One should keep an oath, but it is not necessary to keep a light promise. Has anyone exacted a promise from you?

THEKLA.

Yes.

ADOLPH.

Then you can ask him to release you from it, because your husband is ill.

THEKLA.

No, I won't. You are not too ill to come with me!

ADOLPH.

Why do you always want me to be with you? Do you feel safer that way?

THEKLA.

I don't understand what you mean.

ADOLPH.

You always say that when you know that I mean something—which you don't like!

THEKLA.

In-dee-d! What do I object to, now?

ADOLPH.

Silence! Silence! We are beginning again!—

Good-by for a little while! And be careful what you do! (*Goes through the door at the back and then leaves the stage by the right.*)

(*Thekla alone. Shortly after, Gustave enters and goes directly to the table as if to get a newspaper, apparently without seeing Thekla.*)

THEKLA.

(*Disturbed, masters herself.*)

Is it you?

GUSTAVE.

It is I. Pardon me!

THEKLA.

How did you reach here?

GUSTAVE.

By the land, but—I will not stay, since——

THEKLA.

You may stay!——It has been a long while!

GUSTAVE.

It is a long while!

THEKLA.

You are changed very much!

GUSTAVE.

And you are just as charming as ever! If anything, younger looking!——But, forgive me, I will not embitter your happiness by my presence! Had I known you were here, I should never——

THEKLA.

I beg you to remain, if you do not consider it indelicate.

GUSTAVE.

I see no reason why I shouldn't, but what I think, and what I say might hurt your feelings.

THEKLA.

Sit down for a moment, you do not embarrass me, because you have the unusual ability, as you had always, of being tactful and polite.

GUSTAVE.

You are too good!——But, is it not likely that your husband would regard my presence here in a different light?

THEKLA.

On the contrary, he has often spoken of you with sympathy.

GUSTAVE.

Ah!—All wounds heal, just as wood grows over names cut in a tree—and frequently our good nature makes us forget a grudge.

THEKLA.

He never had a grudge against you, because he never saw you.—What I have often dreamed and hoped was to see you friends for a moment—or at least to see you shake hands in my presence and then part.

GUSTAVE.

It has been my secret desire to see you—whom I loved more than life—in really good hands. And, indeed, I have heard much good of him. I know all of his works and have often wished, before I grew old, to grasp his hand and bid him take good care of the treasure Providence has placed in his possession. I desire to free myself of this unwelcome dislike, and I want joy and humility to enter my soul and help me to live during the rest of my sad life.

THEKLA.

You have spoken my own thoughts and have understood me.—Thank you for that!

GUSTAVE.

Ah, I am an insignificant man and was too obscure to cast a protecting shadow over you. My uneventful life, my slavish labor, my narrow circle, were too great restrictions for your soul, thirsting for freedom. I see it now!——But you understand, you who have plumbed the depths of a man's soul, what it has cost me to confess this!

THEKLA.

That is noble, that is big; to be able to admit one's weaknesses—and not everybody can do that. (*Sighs.*) But your nature was always candid, true and forgiving——I cherished that—but——

GUSTAVE.

I was not so——I was never so, but trouble purifies us, tribulations enoble us and——I have suffered!

THEKLA.

Poor Gustave!——Can you forgive me? Can you? Tell me?

GUSTAVE.

Pardon you? What?——I ask pardon for myself!

THEKLA.

(*Turns away.*)

I believe we are almost crying, we old people!

GUSTAVE.

*(Turns away gently.)*

Old! Yes, I am old! But you, you grow younger and younger!

*(Sits down as if unthinkingly on the chair to the left, whereupon Thekla takes the chaise longue.)*

THEKLA.

Do you think so?

GUSTAVE.

And then you understand how to dress!

THEKLA.

You taught me that! Don't you remember, you used to select my colors!

GUSTAVE.

No!

THEKLA.

You did! Can't you remember—hm—I remember you were cross with me whenever I didn't wear something in pastel colors!



GUSTAVE.

Cross with you! I was never cross with you!

THEKLA.

Yes you were, when you tried to teach me how to think.—Do you remember? I never have been able to learn to think!

GUSTAVE.

Why, of course, you can think! And now you have grown almost too sharp; when you write, at least!

THEKLA.

*(Uncomfortably disturbed, hurries on with the conversation.)*

Yes, my dear Gustave, it is pleasant to see you again, and under such pleasant circumstances.

GUSTAVE.

I never was one to go out much and your life was very peaceful with me.

THEKLA.

Yes, somewhat too peaceful!

GUSTAVE.

Is that so! But, you see, I thought that was how you wanted it. At least it seemed that way when we were engaged.

THEKLA.

Who knows then what one wants! Then one takes all one's ideas from one's mother!

GUSTAVE.

That's the reason you married to suit yourself this time! Artist life is dazzling and your husband doesn't seem to be one of the seven sleepers!

THEKLA.

One can have too much of a good thing.

GUSTAVE.

*(Gets up.)*

What? I believe you are wearing my earrings yet!

THEKLA.

*(Embarrassed.)*

Yes, why shouldn't I?—We never became enemies——and then I thought I would wear them as a sign

——and as a remembrance——that we were not unfriendly——beside, you know, one can't buy such earrings nowadays. (*Takes out one of the earrings.*)

GUSTAVE.

Yes, that is all well and good, but what does your husband say to it?

THEKLA.

Why should I bother about what he says.

GUSTAVE.

Don't you bother about that?——But you might hurt him by that!——It might make him ridiculous!

THEKLA.

(*Shortly, to herself.*)

He is that already, at times!

GUSTAVE.

(*Who has seen that she has difficulty in replacing her earrings, rises.*)

May I help you?

THEKLA.

Thank you so much.

GUSTAVE.

*(Fastens the earring.)*

That little ear!——Suppose your husband should see us now!

THEKLA.

That would set him weeping!

GUSTAVE.

Is he jealous?

THEKLA.

Is he jealous! I should think so! *(Noise in the room to the right.)*

GUSTAVE.

Who lodges in there?

THEKLA.

I don't know.——Now tell me how you are getting on and what you are doing.

GUSTAVE.

Tell me how *you* are!

*(Thekla, embarrassed, unthinkingly removes the cloth from the wax figure.)*

GUSTAVE.

Hello! What is that!——What!——That is you!

THEKLA.

I don't believe it!

GUSTAVE.

But it is so like you!

THEKLA.

*(Cynically.)*

Do you find it so!

GUSTAVE.

That recalls the story, "How can your majesty see that!"

THEKLA.

*(Laughs out loud.)*

You are crazy!——Do you know any new good stories?

GUSTAVE.

No. But you must know several.

THEKLA.

I never hear anything funny nowadays!

GUSTAVE.

Is he stupid?

THEKLA.

Oh, yes!

GUSTAVE.

He wasn't so formerly.

THEKLA.

He is so ill now!

GUSTAVE.

Then why did little brother go and stick his head  
in a strange wasps' nest!

THEKLA.

*(Laughs.)*

You are so crazy!

GUSTAVE.

Poor little girl!—Do you remember when we had  
just been married that we lived in this very room!  
What? It was furnished differently then!—For ex-  
ample, a bureau stood near that pillar and the bed  
stood here.

THEKLA.

Be silent!

GUSTAVE.

Look at me!

THEKLA.

I can do that very well! (*She looks at him.*)

GUSTAVE.

Do you believe one can forget that which has made a vivid impression upon one?

THEKLA.

No! And the power of memory is great! Particularly the power of youthful memory!

GUSTAVE.

Do you remember when I first met you? You were a little lovable child, your mind was a little slate upon which your parents and governesses had penciled some strokes which I had to rub out. And then I wrote new texts upon it according to my own ideas, until it was written full. Therefore, you see, I should not like to be in your husband's place——but that is his affair——But that was one thing which attracted him to you! Our opinions coincide so well that when I sit and talk to you now it seems to me as if I uncorked a flask of old wine of my own bottling! I find my own wine, but he has preempted it! And now that I am in a position to marry again, I have carefully selected a young girl upon whom I can impress my own thoughts; for the woman is the child of the man; when she is not

that, he becomes hers, and then the world is turned topsyturvy!

THEKLA.

Are you going to marry again?

GUSTAVE.

Yes, I shall try my fortune once more, but this time I shall be careful not to make a mess of it!

THEKLA.

Is she pretty?

GUSTAVE.

To me she is! But it may be I am too old! And it is strange——now that chance has led me to you——now I begin to wonder if it is possible to begin the play over again.

THEKLA.

Why so?

GUSTAVE.

My affection is still rooted in you, and when you are present the old wounds break open again. You are a dangerous woman, Thekla!

THEKLA.

Ind-ee-d! And yet my young man says I can make no more conquests!



GUSTAVE.

That is to say that he has ceased to love you.

THEKLA.

I don't understand what he means by love.

GUSTAVE.

You have played hide and seek so long that you can find one another no longer! And so it goes! You were forced to play the part of innocence so realistically that he did not have time for consideration. But that has its inconveniences, it has its inconveniences!

THEKLA.

You reproach me——

GUSTAVE.

Certainly not! What happened had to happen, if it had not happened, the result might have been different; but now that it has happened, it has happened!

THEKLA.

You are a liberal man! And I have never met one with whom I was as well pleased to exchange ideas. You are so free from moralizing and preaching, exhibit such patience with mankind, that one feels free in

your company. Do you know that I am jealous of your future wife!

GUSTAVE.

And do you know that I am jealous of your husband!

THEKLA.

*(Rises.)*

'And now we must part forever! Forever!

GUSTAVE.

Yes, we must part, but not without a farewell! Must we?

THEKLA.

*(Uneasily.)*

But yes!

GUSTAVE.

*(Following her about the room.)*

No, we must have a farewell meeting! We will intoxicate ourselves so deeply that when we awaken we shall have lost our memories——there is such an intoxication! *(Puts his arm about her waist.)* You are depressed by a sick spirit whose consumption annoys you! I would lift you into a new life, I would make your talent bloom, even in autumn, like a mountain rose, I would——*(Two ladies in traveling dress appear*

*at the veranda door, seem surprised, point, laugh, and go away.)*

THEKLA.

*(Freeing herself from Gustave's arm.)*

Who were they?

GUSTAVE.

*(With indifference.)*

They were strangers.

THEKLA.

Go away! I am afraid of you!

GUSTAVE.

Why?

THEKLA.

You take my soul from me!

GUSTAVE.

And give you mine in exchange! Beside, you have no soul, that is only an illusion!

THEKLA.

You have the ability of saying rude things in such a way that one cannot be offended with you!

GUSTAVE.

That is because you feel that I hold the first mortgage on you.—Where shall it be—and how?

THEKLA.

No, it would hurt him! He still loves me and I will not be bad again!

GUSTAVE.

He doesn't love you! Do you want evidence?

THEKLA.

How can you produce it?

GUSTAVE.

*(Picks up the pieces of the photograph from the floor.)*

Here! See for yourself!

THEKLA.

Oh! That is shameful!

GUSTAVE.

You see—Then when shall it be, and how?

THEKLA.

The false little wretch!

GUSTAVE.

When——?

THEKLA.

He takes the eight o'clock boat to-night!

GUSTAVE.

Then——

THEKLA.

At nine o'clock! (*Noise in the room to the right.*)  
Who is that going on in that way?

GUSTAVE.

(*Looking through the keyhole.*)

We will see! An overturned table and a broken carafe; nothing more! Possibly they have locked a dog in there!——At nine, then!

THEKLA.

Very well! Let the blame be his! Such a falsehood from him, who was always preaching in praise of truth and who taught me to speak the truth!——But wait once——how was it then!——He greeted me almost in anger,——did not meet me at the dock——and then

——he said something about the young men on the boat. I acted as if I didn't understand——but how did he know about that?——Wait a minute——and then he philosophised about women——then your memory haunted him——then he announced that he would become a sculptor, as that was the art of the present——just as you used to speculate!

GUSTAVE.

No, really?

THEKLA.

No, really!——Ah! Now I understand! Now I begin to see what a frightful villain you are! You have been here and torn him to pieces! You sat there in the chaise longue! You convinced him that he had the epilepsy, that he must live as a celibate, that he must show himself a man and revolt against his wife! Yes, you were the one!——How long have you been here?

GUSTAVE.

I have been here eight days!

THEKLA.

And it was you I saw on the boat!

GUSTAVE.

It was I!

THEKLA.

And now you think to trap me!

GUSTAVE.

I have done so already!

THEKLA.

Not yet!

GUSTAVE.

Oh, yes!

THEKLA.

You slunk upon my lamb like a wolf! You came here with the villainous plan of disturbing my happiness and you set it in operation until my eyes were opened and I overthrew it!

GUSTAVE.

It is not exactly as you say.—This is the way it really happened!—That things should go wrong with you was naturally my secret wish! But I was almost certain that I could not make them do so! Beside, I had so much else to which to attend that there was no time left me in which to intrigue. But, when by chance I found myself idling about here, and when by chance I saw you and the young men on the steam-boat, I thought the time had come to look in upon you!

I came here and your lamb threw himself at once into the wolf's arms. I gained his sympathy by a system of reflex action, which to explain to you would require me to be more impolite than I care to be. At first I felt compassion for him, as he was in the same position I had been formerly. But then thoughts arose which made my old wounds smart—the book, you know, and the idiot—and I conceived the desire to stick him to death—to stick him through and through so that he could not be patched up again—and fortune favored me, thanks to your intelligent co-operation. You were the feather in the works and had to be broken in two! Now we shall hear it strike!

When I met you here I did not know exactly what I should say. I had an indefinite plan, of course, like that of a chess player, but it depended upon your moves how I should carry out the game! One thing led to another, chance aided me and so I landed the fish—Now you are fast!

THEKLA.

Not yet!

GUSTAVE.

Yes, that you are!—What you wished for least of all has happened. The world, represented by two feminine travelers, whom I did not lead hither,—for I am no plotter—the world has seen how you have become reconciled to your first husband—and once more nestle in his embrace! Is that enough?



THEKLA.

It may be enough for revenge! But tell me, you who are so intelligent, and who think so clearly; how can it be that you, who hold that everything which happens must necessarily happen, and that all our actions are restricted——

GUSTAVE.

*(Correcting.)*

To a certain extent restricted.

THEKLA.

It's the same thing!

GUSTAVE.

No.

THEKLA.

How does it happen that you, who consider me not to blame for doing as I have done, because my nature and circumstances led me; how can you hold that you have a right to revenge yourself?

GUSTAVE.

Upon just the same ground; upon the ground that my nature and circumstances led me to revenge my-

self! Isn't it the same game! But do you know why both of you had to be losers in the battle?

*(Thekla looks at him scornfully.)*

GUSTAVE.

Why I conquered both of you? Because I was stronger and wiser than you. You were the idiot——and he! For, understand, one is not necessarily an idiot because he cannot write books nor paint pictures! Mark you that!

THEKLA.

Are you a complete egotist in your feelings!

GUSTAVE.

A complete one!——But, see you, it is on that account that I can understand a little what you have suffered, and feel a little for what you must suffer.

THEKLA.

And all this because I wounded your self-love!

GUSTAVE.

Not that alone! To continue wounding other self-loves! That is, the secret spot that one has!

THEKLA.

A revengeful wretch! Pooh!

GUSTAVE.

A wanton wretch! Pooh!

THEKLA.

That is my character, is it?

GUSTAVE.

That is my character, is it?—One must investigate the human nature of the other before one can give one's own nature free play! Otherwise, divorce, and the end is howling and gnashing of teeth!

THEKLA.

You can never forgive——

GUSTAVE.

But I have forgiven you!

THEKLA.

You!

GUSTAVE.

Certainly! Have I lifted my hand against you in all these years? No! And now I have only to come

here and peep in to set you at odds. Have I reproached you, have I moralized, have I preached? No! I have amused myself with your husband a little and that was enough to bring him into his proper place. But I stand here as the plaintiff and excuse myself! Thekla, have you no reproaches to make?

THEKLA.

Certainly not! The Christians assert that Providence regulates all our acts; others call it Fate—are we not guiltless?

GUSTAVE.

Yes, to a certain extent, but there remains the small margin of free will, and there the debt of sin rests, and the creditor must be paid sooner or later. Guiltless, yet responsible! Guiltless before Him, because He exists no longer; answerable to yourself and your fellow men.

THEKLA.

You came then and demanded payment!

GUSTAVE.

I came to take back what you had stolen, not what had been given to you. You stole my honor and, as I cannot recover that, I have taken yours! Was I right?

THEKLA.

Honor! Hm! And now you are satisfied?

GUSTAVE.

Now I am satisfied! (*Rings for the waiter.*)

THEKLA.

And now you are going to your fiancée?

GUSTAVE.

I have none! And I never shall have one. I am not going home, because I have no home and never shall have one! (*The waiter enters.*) Give me my bill, I must take the eight o'clock boat. (*The waiter bows and goes.*)

THEKLA.

Without atonement?

GUSTAVE.

"Atonement?" You have so many words which have lost their meaning! "Atonement?" Is it likely that we shall live long enough. One must atone by restitution, but you cannot do that! You have not only taken, but you have destroyed what you have taken, so that it cannot be restored!—Would you be satisfied if I were to say: Forgive me because you have dishonoured me; forgive me because I have been a laughing stock for my students every day for seven years; forgive me because I freed you from parental restraint,

liberated you from the tyranny of ignorance and superstition; because I set you at the head of my household, gave you friends and position, and changed you from a child to a woman!——Now I cross off my bill! Go now and make your account with the other!

THEKLA.

What have you done to him?——I begin to dread something frightful!

GUSTAVE.

With him!——Do you love him still?

THEKLA.

Yes!

GUSTAVE.

And you loved me once! Was that true?

THEKLA.

It was true!

GUSTAVE.

Do you know what you are then?

THEKLA.

You curse me?

GUSTAVE.

I denounce you! That is a quality, I do not say a fault, but a quality, which must be unprofitable on ac-

count of its result. Poor Thekla!—I don't know——I almost believe it moves me, although I am innocent——as you! But possibly it may be good for you to feel what I felt once!—Do you know where your husband is?

THEKLA.

I believe I know!—He is in your room next to this!—And he who sees his guardian angel dies!—\*

*(Adolph appears at the veranda door, white as a corpse, with a bloody mark on one of his cheeks; his eyes are fixed and there is white foam on his mouth.)*

GUSTAVE.

*(Softly.)*

No, there he is! Make your reckoning with him and then you will see if he is as generous as I am!—Farewell! *(Goes to the left, but remains on the stage.)*

THEKLA.

*(Goes toward Adolph with wide-open arms.)*

Adolph!

\* NOTE.—According to Teutonic superstition his guardian angel appears to a man immediately before his death.

*(Adolph sinks down in the doorway.)*

THEKLA.

*(Throwing herself upon Adolph's body and caressing it.)*

Adolph! My darling! Are you alive! Speak, speak!—Forgive your wicked Thekla!—Forgive! Forgive! Forgive! Little brother must answer, does he hear!—No, my God, he does not hear! He is dead! O God in Heaven; O my God, help us, help us!

GUSTAVE.

She really did love him too!—Poor creature!

(CURTAIN.)



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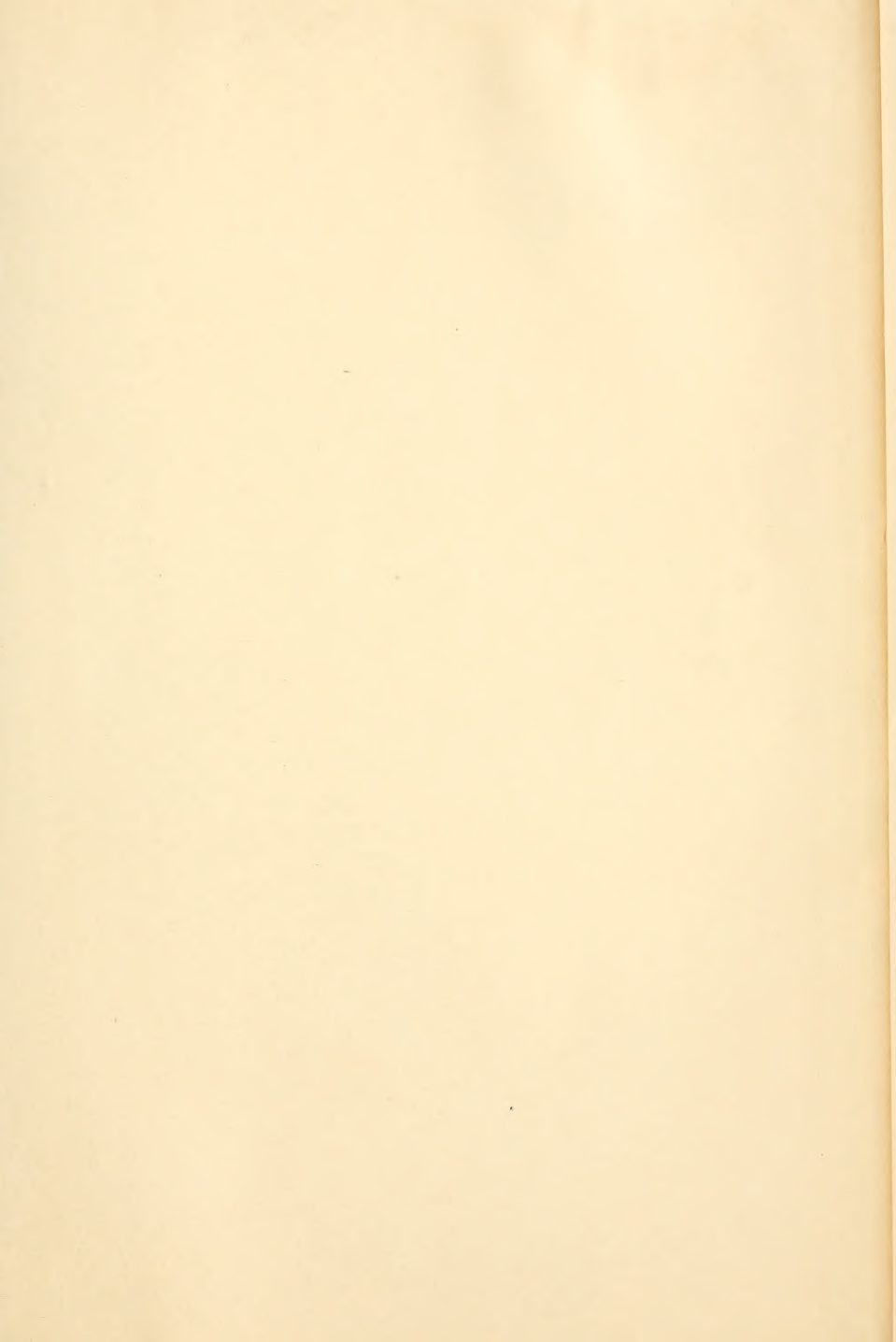












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